

# BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT

## Death of a Parent in Adult Life

The death of a parent can create feelings of vulnerability. When a parent dies, there are often other feelings of loss. There may be the loss of a home, the sense of loss of our link with the past, even the loss of the expectation that someday our relationship might have changed. Also, there may be strong feelings of longing – a need to have a parent around ‘forever’ to share our future accomplishments and offer support in our times of need. There may be regrets – of things said or not said.

Factors that can shape grieving - a parent's death:

- **Our parents are our "wisdom keepers."** They're the repositories of knowledge about our history, our upbringing, family traditions, the names of all those faces in old photos. With their passing so, too, goes the information and insight that hasn't already been transmitted or recorded.
- **Unresolved issues often follow the parent-child relationship into adulthood.** The balance of the parent-child relationship shifts several times, first as we gain maturity and create our own families, and then as parents grow older and often need our support. These realities bring plenty of opportunities for misunderstanding or discord. And not all these bumps are smoothed out by the end. Differences that go unreconciled can leave a forlorn sense of unfinished business.
- **Parent death always feels sudden -- even when it's not.** People often expect that the death of someone older or someone who's been ill for a long time will feel easier to endure because it's predictable. Yet the disappearance from your life of a figure you've known since birth is, when it finally happens, always a sudden change.
- **Decisions about rituals are up to you.** "Suddenly you're the adult preparing the funeral, there's nobody older to tell you how to manage, no one to correct you or say, 'No, that's not how you do it!'" says one woman in her 40s who lost both parents within two years. "I felt pushed to a different level of adulthood."
- **Your children lose grandparents.** Many people who lose their parents talk about "grieving for what won't ever be" -- being unable to ask their parents for parenting advice, for example, or having their parents attend their children's birthday parties, graduations, and weddings. Parents may also need to help their children mourn, or they may feel a need to preserve the grandparents' legacy for their children.
- **Losing the "buffer generation" forces us to re-examine our own mortality.** When a grandparent dies, there's still a whole generation between you and death. With a parent's death, your own death may feel uncomfortably nearer.
- **Suggestions** \* Let your siblings, friends, and family members know how you are feeling; be available to give and receive support from each other \* Invite conversations about the memories you have of your parent \* Set up a memorial space in your home; place flowers or candles, a picture of your parent, a place to write messages or thoughts \* Give yourself plenty of time to grieve and grow.

Recommended reading:

<http://www.ourhouse-grief.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Death-of-a-Parent.pdf>

<http://winterspring.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/102470205-Adult-Parent-Loss.pdf>



For further information please contact Patricia Thomas, Bereavement Consultant on (02) 9649 6423 or email [patriciat@catholiccemeteries.com.au](mailto:patriciat@catholiccemeteries.com.au) or visit [www.catholiccemeteries.com.au](http://www.catholiccemeteries.com.au)

*"To tell a person in grief not to grieve may be the unkindest cut of all. It denies them the right to re-evaluate their lives, to treasure their past, and to be accompanied through their new fears. Because we are not prepared to deal with the reality of loss, we want no one else to face it either".*



*"Death does not end our story...  
Death does not end our relationships...  
Life is changed not ended"*